

First pharmacy health trainer at work

Last week, NHS health trainer partnerships and third party organisations discussed the scheme at a Department of Health conference held in London. Afterwards, **Dawn Connelly** met the first pharmacy assistant to become an accredited health trainer to hear about her role

Jane Holland, a senior pharmacy assistant at Rowlands Pharmacy in Bolsover, Derbyshire, is the first accredited NHS health trainer working within community pharmacy. Mrs Holland qualified as a trainer in April and believes that the role fits well with her existing work in the pharmacy. "I was already providing smoking cessation advice and when this job came up it seemed like a natural extension to what I was doing," says Mrs Holland. She believes that the health trainer role will give her more time to spend with clients.

Mrs Holland has worked at the pharmacy for eight years and has lived in Bolsover all her life. "A big part of the health trainer role is knowing the local community," she says. "I was born here and all my family live here. The town has suffered from pit closures over the years and I know the effect it has had on people within my family as well as the wider community. Being a local, I understand the health issues that are related to both mining and the chemical industry, which was also a major employer here."

When she learned via Rowlands that the local primary care trust was one of the early implementer sites for the health trainer scheme, she was keen to expand her knowledge of health-related issues and jumped at the chance to get involved. She started her training in December 2005 with three rounds of classroom training lasting a total of seven days. The training started with topics such as learning skills and self-development, behavioural change, motivation and support. The second stage of the training was on-site at the project where Mrs Holland would be based — the Bolsover Wellness Programme, in Cresswell. Here she attended seminars on mental health, nutrition, smoking cessation, alcohol awareness, weight management and sexual health. She also learnt how to understand body language and to communicate effectively. She undertook a project to help her get to grips with Bolsover as a community, including studying local health statistics and demographics. She passed the training course in April.

The Bolsover Wellness Programme is an exercise scheme, to which any member of the primary care health team can refer people. Typical participants are those with depression, diabetes, weight problems or cardiac problems. Currently about 90 people per month are referred to the scheme.

Wider role

Nicky Roe, pharmacy service development manager at Rowlands, is excited by the cross-boundary working opportunities that having

a health trainer in the pharmacy provides. "You have got a community pharmacy employee working as a health trainer in a project hosted by the district council but connected to health via PCT funding. There are inward and onward referral pathways into that community pharmacy and finally we begin to feel like part of a joined up, cohesive health movement," she says.

"Ideally we would like referrals into the pharmacy environment, through other health care professionals," says Mrs Roe. She would like to see health trainers using consultation areas in community pharmacies for appointments with their clients. She believes that the accessibility of community pharmacies and the existing customer base make them the perfect location for health trainers to be based. "We see people come into the pharmacy who are suffering from social isolation or who need these exercise programmes but we don't have the formalised pathways to link them into. Jane's role as a health trainer is enabling that to happen for this community."

Signposting

The signposting role of a health trainer is more extensive than that required of community pharmacists under the new contract. Judy Derricott, who works on the health improvement team at North Eastern Derbyshire PCT and manages the health trainers, says: "You are giving information but you are also supporting that person to take up that referral. And that might involve going along with that person, or making a phone call for that person, or motivating them to make their own phone call."



Jane Holland: health trainer is a natural extension of her current role

Mrs Holland has built up a directory of local services and can signpost clients to a wide variety, including social services, aids and equipment and weight management services.

Customer benefits

Mrs Roe believes that pharmacy customers benefit from having a health trainer on the premises. "In a very busy pharmacy environment you haven't necessarily got the time that needs to be devoted to that intense one-to-one conversation with a patient. Now, any member of staff in the pharmacy can refer customers to the health trainer."

NHS Health trainers

The concept of health trainers was first mooted in 2004 in the Government's public health White Paper "Choosing health". In 2005, "Choosing health through pharmacy" suggested that pharmacy staff, particularly medicines counter assistants, could obtain health trainer status. It also proposed that pharmacies could be used as a setting where health trainers are available, and that pharmacists and their staff could have a role in supporting health trainers.

The role of a health trainer is to support and motivate individuals to achieve the changes they want to make to improve their health. Trainers are drawn from local communities with the aim that they will understand the day-to-day concerns of the people they are supporting. Health trainers will also provide signposting into other services and support available locally, both in the NHS and the wider community.

In September 2005, 12 early implementer sites for health trainers were given £200,000 to test out a draft set of core competencies and job descriptions prepared by the Department of Health Skills for Health programme. The most disadvantaged areas were chosen with the aim of making it easier for individuals in these areas to make healthier choices. Each site developed its own course based on the draft competencies specified by the DoH.

In April 2006, national roll out of the scheme began, with public health minister Caroline Flint predicting that by early 2007, about 1,200 trainers will be in place. All health trainers are attached to a local project.

Health trainers are employed by the NHS and it is proposed that they will be paid at Agenda for Change band 3.

North Eastern Derbyshire PCT compensated Rowlands for the time Mrs Holland spent on her health trainer role and, from 1 July, she entered into a contract with the PCT and now works three days a week for Rowlands and two days a week for the PCT. She will start by spending one morning a week of her health trainer role in the pharmacy but hopes that this will increase as time passes. "The most challenging thing for me now is to get [the role] working in the pharmacy," she says.

Mrs Roe believes that another challenge is how Mrs Holland can engage with new clients coming into the pharmacy. "At the moment there are posters up in the pharmacy and flyers going out in prescription bags, and Jane is there on her days as a health trainer wearing her Bolsover Wellness Programme tracksuit."

Government strategy

Gul Root, principal pharmaceutical officer at the Department of Health, told *The Journal* that she is delighted to hear that a pharmacy assistant has been trained and accredited as a health trainer. "In 'Choosing health through pharmacy', a programme for pharmaceutical public health, we said that some pharmacy staff, particularly medicines counter assistants, who often come from the local community, could acquire accredited health trainer status and that pharmacies could be used as a setting where health trainers are available.



Nicky Roe: would like referrals into the pharmacy environment

"I believe that Mrs Holland will be spending part of her time practising as a health trainer within the pharmacy. This is very much in alignment with our strategy, to maximise the contribution of pharmacists, their staff, and the premises from where they practise, to help improve health and reduce health inequalities."

Mrs Root adds that as part of their signposting role within the new contractual framework, pharmacists and their staff could put people in touch with health trainers. "Other

pharmacies in the area could put people in touch with, for example, Mrs Holland, if the local primary care trust wished to do so."

Workforce development

How the health trainer role can fit alongside a community pharmacy skills set is something that Mrs Roe believes has to be examined at a national level. She proposes that health trainer training could be incorporated into the national vocational qualification for pharmacy assistants. "Ideally what I would like to see is potential progression from counter assistant through to a specialist module to become a health trainer."

Raising the profile of the health trainer role, both locally and nationally, is something that needs to be addressed, says Mrs Roe. "There needs to be a wider national understanding of how you can integrate with the hubs. If I had a pharmacy in a community where I thought that a health trainer was needed, I would without hesitation go to the PCT or local authority and find out who the health trainer lead is."

Rowlands will now look at the possibility of rolling out the health trainer role in its other pharmacies.

Mrs Root hopes that hearing about Mrs Holland's success will encourage other pharmacy staff to become accredited health trainers. "Pharmacy staff are ideally placed to attain health trainer status," she says.

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